

THE PARADOX OF FAMILY STRUCTURE AND PLANS AFTER WORK: WHY SINGLE
CHILDLESS EMPLOYEES MAY BE THE LEAST ABSORBED AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

Existing research shows that positive family experiences can affect work positively. In this article, however, we consider how family can enhance work even when family experiences are not explicitly positive. We draw on boundary theory and cognitive psychology's current concerns theory to consider how employees' family structures and associated after-work activities affect their work absorption. A survey of business school alumni (study 1) revealed that single, childless workers reported lower absorption than workers with other family structures. Further, a daily diary study of university employees (study 2), showed that employees' planned after-work activities explained the relationship between family structure and work absorption. Specifically, single, childless workers anticipated fewer domestic after-work activities, resulting in lower work absorption. Due to similarities between domestic responsibilities and work tasks—e.g., their obligatory and goal-directed nature—anticipating domestic responsibilities after work reinforces, rather than distracts from, the work mindset, thus keeping employees more immersed psychologically in their work. This finding suggests that having a spouse and/or children can affect employees' work absorption positively through the anticipation of domestic duties after work. Thus, our study contributes to a more comprehensive view of how employees' work and non-work lives are connected.

“Janet’s perfect for that job because for that job, you have to have no life. Janet has no family. Perfect...”

- Former Pennsylvania governor Edward Rendell regarding former Arizona governor Janet Napolitano’s nomination for Secretary of Homeland Security (Collins, 2008: A43).

As illustrated in the opening quote, family structure—the presence or absence of a spouse and/or children—is often treated as a signal of an individual’s ability to devote themselves to work, due to assumptions about how family structure predicts life outside of work.

Organizational research documents these assumptions extensively. For example, within Wall Street financial services firms, assumptions about workers’ family responsibilities are related to differences in pay and advancement (Roth, 2003). Moreover, supervisors’ perceptions that employee family responsibilities compete with work have a negative impact on employee promotions and performance appraisals, regardless of whether the employees actually face difficulty managing work and family role responsibilities (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009). These traditional expectations are reified in scholarship on the “ideal worker,” a term recognizing the historical organizational preference for “unencumbered” workers who can devote their energy and attention primarily to the work role (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001; Reid, 2015; Williams, 2001).

Although the original “ideal worker” concept evoked a specific family structure — men with wives who were not employed (Williams, 2001) — more recently, single, childless workers have been described as fitting the ideal worker model due to expectations that they have few domestic responsibilities to detract from their focus on work (Blair-Loy, 2004). Yet, whereas research documents the very real challenges of managing work and family responsibilities (see Eby et al., 2005 for a review), there is little evidence that family detracts consistently from employees’ work, and little research comparing those with nuclear families to those without. This omission is problematic, given that single, childless workers are a growing segment of the

workforce (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006), currently comprising nearly 36% of all workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In this paper, we focus on single, childless employees to examine the connections among employee family structure, after-work activities, and work absorption, a central component of work engagement defined as a flow-like state of full immersion (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2011; Rothbard, 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006), critical for complex work (Hobfoll, 2011). Building on boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), Richter's (1990) concept of anticipatory boundary transitions, and current concerns theory (Klinger, Barta, & Maxeiner, 1980), we posit that employees' anticipated after-work activities, driven by family structure, affect work absorption in a manner contrary to traditional expectations.

Whereas early work-family studies fell within the depletion perspective (Rothbard, 2001), primarily addressing the negative effects of family on work such as interrole conflict (Coverman, 1989; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), more recent scholarship increasingly addresses ways that employees' non-work lives, including family and other roles, can have a net positive impact on their work (Dumas & Stanko, 2017; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). Work-family "enrichment" scholarship considers mechanisms such as skill transfer, social support, and positive affect, through which having a family can impact work experiences positively (e.g., Dumas & Stanko, 2017; Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), even while co-existing with negative effects of family responsibilities (Rothbard, 2001; Ten Brummelhuis, Van der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2010). Similarly, research on prosocial motivation shows that the need to support one's family can serve as a source of work motivation, energizing employee effort and improving performance (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, & Grant, 2017). Also, research based on the effort-recovery model (Meijman

& Mulder, 1998) shows how after-work activities can replenish employees' energy and cognitive resources, re-charging their return to work the next day (Sonnentag, 2003; Van Hooff, Geurts, Beckers, & Kompier, 2011).

With the growing body of enrichment research, the question arises as to whether family or non-work experiences are only beneficial for work when they are explicitly positive. Also, whereas the motivation to support one's family can increase employee motivation on simple work tasks that are not intrinsically motivating (e.g., Menges et al., 2017), it is less clear how family responsibilities affect work contributions in jobs that are more complex and inherently more engaging (Mainemelis, 2001; Quinn, 2005). We propose that these issues may be addressed, in part, by examining the connection between family structure and activities employees anticipate at the end of each work day. An existing body of research focuses on how after-work activities affect employees' recovery the *following* work day (Oerlemans, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006), but we flip this focus to highlight how *anticipating* after-work activities affects absorption during the work day.

Our perspective contributes to existing literature in several ways. We contribute to theories addressing the positive impact of family on work by considering a mechanism other than the transfer of affect or skills (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001) or the expansion of available resources through motivation (e.g., Menges et al., 2017). Rather, we focus on the psychological effects of anticipating future activities whereby anticipating goal directed, obligatory activities helps induce a mindset conducive to absorption at work. This suggests that having a family can affect work absorption positively whether or not the family experience is positive, and offers a different perspective on the effects of after-work activities. In addition, we contribute by exploring the connection between family structure and non-work activities.

Assumptions abound regarding the effects of family structure on employees' activities outside of work (SHRM Online Staff, 2011); however, in this paper, we assess this issue directly.

Accordingly, we broaden the consideration of the work-family interface by highlighting single, childless workers who remain under-examined and largely absent from existing work-family studies (Wilson and Baumann [2015] is a notable exception). With this research we seek to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive view of the work/non-work connection.

FAMILY STRUCTURE, AFTER-WORK ACTIVITIES AND WORK ABSORPTION

We examine the connection between family structure and employees' work absorption – the intensity of concentration, focus and psychological immersion while working (Kahn, 1990; Rothbard, 2001). Absorption addresses a central and uniquely psychological aspect of work engagement (Kahn, 1990; Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2011; Rothbard, 2001; Rothbard & Patil, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). When employees are absorbed, they feel lost in time and are fully present psychologically—an outcome particularly relevant for knowledge workers who must apply cognitive resources to solve complex problems (Quinn, 2005). Therefore, we consider the connection between family structure and work absorption in the context of complex, knowledge-based work for which absorption is critical, but also where the work itself can be interesting and compelling (Mainemelis, 2001; Quinn, 2005). Thus we address processes distinct from those covered in research addressing the effects of family-related motivation on low-skilled work, whereby the desire to help one's family increases work effort, but only when the work provides little intrinsic motivation (e.g., Menges et al., 2017).

Research on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), which addresses the nature of the work/non-work interface and employee transitions between work and non-work domains, provides insight into how employees' work absorption may relate to their family structure and

after-work activities. According to boundary theory, employees often transcend the work/non-work boundary *cognitively* by thinking about non-work activities while they are still at work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Glavin, Schieman, & Reid, 2011; Nippert-Eng, 1996). In essence, they are making mental transitions to their non-work roles before the work day is over (Ashforth et al., 2000; Smit et al., 2016). This is particularly the case for non-work roles that are highly salient to employees, such as being a spouse or parent (Ashforth et al., 2000; Dumas & Stanko, 2017). Boundary research also suggests that differences in the types of after-work activities may shape employees' experiences during the work day. For example, in a qualitative study of daily work-to-home transitions among middle managers in dual-income couples, Richter (1990) identified several transition styles including the "anticipatory" transition style whereby the "...psychological transition precedes the physical transition" (p. 145), and observed that the nature of the anticipated after-work activity affected managers' mindsets at the end of the work day. Interviewees who anticipated going home to housework or childcare duties worked harder toward the end of the work day and remained mentally preoccupied with work even on the commute home, whereas those anticipating relaxation or recreation after work detached psychologically from work earlier in the day. Unlike our focus on family structure and work absorption, Richter (1990) addressed gender differences in work-home transitions. However, the pattern she observed suggests that anticipated activities affect mental transitions away from work and thus affect work absorption.

Anticipating Domestic and Leisure Activities After Work

Scholars have studied a variety of after-work activities, and domestic and leisure activities figure prominently in existing research (Oerlemans et al., 2014; Saxbe, Repetti, & Graesch, 2011; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). Drawing on this research, we define domestic

activities as those associated with maintaining a household, including cooking, cleaning, laundry, home repairs, managing finances, and child care duties (e.g., bathing, feeding) (Oerlemans et al., 2014; Vernon, 2010). We define leisure activities as those pursued for recreation, including socializing, sports, outings to cultural events, or other forms of entertainment (Lee et al., 2015; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012). In general, domestic activities are obligatory, goal-directed—pursued for the sake of achieving an objective—and require effort (Lee et al., 2015; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Conversely, leisure activities are voluntary, characterized by freedom, and are intrinsically motivating, with the goal of relaxation or enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Iso-Ahola, 1997; Zijlstra & Cropley, 2006).

The effects of anticipating domestic or leisure activities on work absorption can be explained, in part, by current concerns theory (Klinger et al., 1980), which addresses factors inducing mind wandering away from the current task. According to this theory, people focus on stimuli that is most compelling (Smallwood, 2013). When future events are novel, non-routine, or voluntary, they may be considered more compelling than current tasks (Forster & Lavie, 2014; Haas, Criscuolo, & George, 2015). For example, when an employee is at work (current task), they may anticipate obligatory, routine domestic tasks—laundry or a sink full of dirty dishes. This anticipation may render them absorbed at work because it reinforces a goal-directed mindset, but also because the anticipated task may be less compelling than work (the current task), particularly if work is inherently engaging. However, anticipating a concert with friends after work may make it more difficult for the employee to concentrate at work, because the novel, non-routine, voluntary anticipated activity takes the employee out of a goal-directed mindset, and may also be more salient or compelling than work (the current task).

Our characterization of the differential contrast of domestic and leisure activities with work also draws from research addressing the impact of after-work activities on employee recovery from work (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). A critical driver of the recovery process, whereby people replenish the resources expended through work effort, is psychological detachment from work, described as completely disengaging from work, refraining from thinking about work (Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998) or mentally “switching off” from work (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Psychological detachment from work is greater to the extent that after-work activities present a notable departure from work tasks, or draw on a different set of resources than the individual’s recurring pattern of work activities (Etzion et al., 1998; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Leisure activities present a greater departure from work relative to domestic activities, because domestic activities draw on some of the same resources as work tasks (Lee et al., 2015; Oerlemans et al., 2014; Saxbe et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Braun, 2013; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). In recovery research, greater detachment resulting from after-work leisure activities can increase engagement on the *subsequent* work day (Sonnentag & Braun, 2013). However, we expect that *anticipating* leisure activities can reduce work absorption during the *current* work day. Conversely, since domestic activities are less likely to induce psychological detachment *after* work (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006), but rather may heighten goal direction and a work mindset, we expect that *anticipating* them may increase work absorption.

Importantly, our arguments differ from the compensation model (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), which explains that employees may invest more in their work to make up for negative family experiences. Rather than focusing on negative or deficient experiences in the work and non-work domains, we address the extent to which after-work activities are goal-directed and obligatory as are work tasks, or present a departure from the work routine. Further, we focus on

absorption, which is an emergent state (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2011; Rothbard, 2001), as opposed to a conscious choice, such as staying at work late to avoid going home (e.g., Hochschild, 1997).

Family Structure and After-Work Activities

The expectation that family structure predicts after-work activities is embedded within our examination of family structure, after-work activities, and work absorption. People devote more time to roles that are important to their identities or self-concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Stryker, 1968)—and spouses or parents are more likely to view the family role as central to their identities than are single, childless employees (Dumas & Stanko, 2017; Wilson & Baumann, 2015). Naturally, parents spend time attending to their children's needs (Aryee & Luk, 1996). Moreover, time-use scholars explain that married couples spend more time than singles on responsibilities such as cleaning, whether or not they have children. Since married couples have partners for sharing household tasks, they choose to perform those tasks themselves rather than outsource them, yet even with task sharing, they still devote more time to domestic activities than do single, childless people (Vernon, 2010). For example, married couples—whether parents or not—prepare more of their meals at home than single, childless individuals do (Kroshus, 2008). Also, married couples typically live in larger residences than singles do, and they are more likely to be homeowners and therefore spend more time on home maintenance (Vernon, 2010). We thus expect single, childless employees to anticipate fewer domestic activities after work than employees with other family structures.

Conversely, we expect single, childless employees to anticipate more leisure activities after work than those with other family structures. Single, childless employees are more likely than employees with other family structures to identify with their personal, non-family based

roles (Wilson & Baumann, 2015). Thus, we expect that they are more likely to devote their time to leisure pursuits than someone with a family would. Similarly, due to the high value modern society places on workplace achievement and family devotion, workers who are married and/or have children often sacrifice leisure time to spend more time either at work or with their families (Hochschild, 1997; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Schor, 1991). Importantly, some scholars note that this discrepancy in leisure activities between single, childless employees and those with other family structures may depend on the type of leisure activities considered (Lee & Bhargava, 2004). For example, parents devote time to family-based leisure activities such as taking children to the zoo (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000). However, in general, existing findings support the overall argument that single, childless employees pursue more leisure activities in their non-work time than do employees with families.

We argue that differences in after-work activities help explain the relationship between family structure and work absorption. Since single, childless workers tend to anticipate fewer domestic responsibilities and more leisure activities after work compared to workers with other family structures, we expect that single, childless employees will report lower work absorption. We also expect that the anticipation of domestic activities and leisure activities after work will mediate this effect. We therefore predict the following:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between family structure and work absorption, such that single, childless employees report lower work absorption than employees with other family structures.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between domestic activities and work absorption, such that anticipating domestic activities after work increases work absorption.

Hypothesis 3: There is a negative relationship between leisure activities and work absorption, such that anticipating leisure activities after work decreases work absorption.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant indirect effect of family structure on work absorption operating through the anticipation of domestic activities after work, such that compared to workers with families, single, childless people anticipate fewer domestic activities after work—and anticipating fewer domestic activities results in lower work absorption.

Hypothesis 5: There is a significant indirect effect of family structure on work absorption operating through the anticipation of leisure activities after work such that compared to workers with families, single childless workers anticipate more leisure activities after work – and anticipating more leisure activities results in lower work absorption.

STUDY 1

Sample and Procedure

We randomly sampled 1,966 undergraduate business and master of business administration (M.B.A.) alumni of a private U.S. university as part of a larger work-life study. Sample members had graduated from 69 years to 1 year prior to data collection. This sample allowed for a variety of family structures, and business graduates tend to assume complex and skilled jobs for which absorption is highly relevant (Hobfoll, 2011; Quinn, 2005).

We used a mixed-mode, four-contact strategy of sending a web-based survey via e-mail first, followed by a combination of e-mail and paper reminders (Dillman, 2000). We received a total of 562 surveys for a 29% response rate. We removed respondents who were not currently employed ($n = 46$) or retired from the sample ($n = 47$) because they could not answer questions about their current work absorption. This resulted in 469 available respondents of whom 61.8% were male. Their average age was 39.07, and 82.4% were Caucasian. Organizational tenure was as follows: 42.2% less than 3 years, 34.7% 3 to 10 years, 23.1% more than 10 years, and 75.7% of respondents held a master's degree or higher. Married respondents made up 72.9% of the sample, and the mean number of children for all respondents was .94. Finally, 81.7% reported

occupations in management and business functions, based on the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics standard occupational classifications. Other professions (18.3%) included lawyers, realtors, architects, and engineers.

The final sample size was 353 (75.3% of the 469 available participants) due to listwise deletion for missing data.¹ The final sample used in the analysis is similar to all available respondents in terms of gender distribution ($X^2(1) = .23, p > .05$), marital status ($X^2(1) = .01, p > .05$), level within the firm ($X^2(3) = .08, p > .05$), highest degree ($X^2(2) = .20, p > .05$), and work absorption ($X^2(5) = 2.18, p > .05$).

Measures

Work absorption. We measured work absorption using four items from the absorption subscale of Rothbard's (2001) engagement scale. The work absorption construct captures the extent to which individuals become engrossed in their work, and it is common across engagement measures used by different scholars (Rothbard & Patil, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas, & Saks, 2012). We averaged the following four items to reflect work absorption: "when I am working, I often lose track of time"; "I often get carried away by what I am working on"; "nothing can distract me when I am working"; "when I am working, I am totally absorbed by it" (1=*strongly agree* to 7=*strongly disagree*) ($\alpha = .78$).

Family structure. We coded family structure to compare singles without children to all other family structures. The singles category includes never married (86.7%), divorced (10%), and widowed respondents (3.3%). The married category includes married (98.8%) and same-sex

¹ As this study was part of a large scale work-life project, there was attrition as the survey progressed. Family structure and demographic controls—primary contributors to the loss of N—were at the end of the long survey.

domestic partnership (1.2%) respondents.² We coded respondents as parents if they had minor children in the home, consistent with research on similar populations (Graves et al., 2007; Hammer et al., 2005). We coded this variable 1 for single/childless and 0 for all other family structures.

Control variables. Gender is central to work-life models (Eby et al., 2005), and it is also a major component of the ideal worker norm (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010; Reid, 2015). Therefore, we controlled for the respondents' sex as a proxy for gender (0=male and 1=female). Older respondents may be more skilled in managing multiple role demands, and age may influence the priority of work over non-work (Gordon & Whelan, 1998; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). Moreover, contextual factors may have a greater effect on engagement among older workers (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007). Therefore, we controlled for *age*, measured in years. Last, we controlled for *job level*, since higher positions provide more complexity, autonomy, and significance, which enhance absorption (Rothbard & Patil, 2012). Respondents indicated their level in the organization (1=entry level, 2=lower level, 3=middle level, 4=senior level).

Results & Discussion: Study 1

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations. Hypothesis 1 predicted that single, childless respondents would report lower levels of absorption. We tested this hypothesis via ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. As we expected, the effect of being single and childless on work absorption was negative and significant ($b = -.31$, $S.E. = .13$, $p < .05$).

² There was no separate category for heterosexual couples who cohabitate. These respondents likely chose either married or single depending on their view of their relationship, or left this question blank. Thus this is a conservative test.

The full equation is: $\text{absorption} = 4.06 - .07 \times \text{gender} - .002 \times \text{age} + .13 \times \text{job level} - .31 \times \text{single/childless}$ (N=353). Hypothesis 1 was thus supported.

Several questions remain, however. With our study 1 data, we were not able to test whether anticipating after-work activities mediates the effect of family structure on absorption. Additionally, the study 1 data consisted of perceptions collected from a single survey instrument, which limits the causal inference of the study and can result in common-method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

Insert Table 1 about here

STUDY 2

We designed Study 2 to test the indirect effect of family structure on absorption through its effects on employees' anticipation of domestic or leisure activities after work. We also sought to examine how work absorption might change from day to day as a result of employees' non-work activities, given prior studies showing daily fluctuations in engagement (e.g., Sonnentag, 2003). Therefore, in study 2 we utilized a daily diary survey methodology extending over five work days, as well as a one-time general survey.

Sample and Procedure

We surveyed employees of one non-academic division of a large, private university. The division was composed primarily of professional staff engaged in one area of administration, reporting to the university's leadership team. As with study 1, we used a four-contact strategy (Dillman, 2000), consisting of an introduction to the study and a series of reminders.

Respondents completed the general survey at least three weeks before the first daily diary survey. The general survey measured all person-level variables, such as marital and parental

status, and some of the control variables. Out of 216 invited employees, 103 participated in the general survey for a response rate of 48%. Salaried professional staff were 88.4%, and the remaining twelve percent (11.6%) were hourly support staff. Organizational tenure was as follows: 28.4% less than 1 year, 25.3% 1 to 3 years, 36.8% 3 to 10 years, and 9.5% over 10 years. Forty-seven percent (46.8%) were married, and the mean number of children among all respondents was 1.75. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 65 ($M=43.35$, $SD=10.81$). Women were 81%, Caucasian respondents were 84%, and African-Americans were 14%.

The daily diary survey measured all within-person, day-level variables. For five consecutive days, participants received two surveys, one at the beginning of their day with questions about their anticipated plans after work, and one at 3:00 PM with work absorption items. Given that participants had varying work stop times, we chose 3:00 PM for the afternoon survey as it was far enough into the day to assess absorption throughout the day, yet early enough to precede the day's end. Out of the 103 general survey participants, 97 completed at least one daily survey. We received 354 matched morning and afternoon responses (73% response rate). This rate represents a mean of 3.6 matched responses per participant, suggesting broad participation across respondents. The person-level and day-level sample sizes are consistent with other daily diary studies (e.g., Ilies, Keeney, & Scott, 2011; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006).

Measures

Independent and dependent variables. We measured *work absorption* using the same items used in study 1. The items were re-worded, however, to reflect that specific day (e.g., "Today, nothing could distract me when I was working") ($\alpha = .99$). The *family structure* variable was identical to that of the study 1, in which 1=single, childless ($N=23$) and 0=all others ($N=66$).

Proportion of domestic & proportion of leisure activities. On the daily morning survey, participants were asked, “Do you have any non-work related activities, commitments, or responsibilities planned for the period of time after your regular work day?” Participants who answered “yes” were asked to list up to 5 activities (mean=1.3) and to categorize each activity from a list of four options: domestic or family-related responsibility, leisure, community/volunteer commitment, or personal development and wellness. Examples of activities participants categorized as domestic included going to the grocery store, cooking dinner, taking children to or from activities, and pet care. Examples of leisure activities listed were; going out for dinner with friends, family outings, or attending cultural or sporting events. Respondents reported an average of .78 planned domestic and .24 planned leisure activities across the five days. The appendix includes more examples of activities categorized as domestic or leisure.

To calculate the respondents’ daily anticipated *proportion of domestic* and *proportion of leisure* activities, we divided the number of domestic activities and the number of leisure activities each by the total number of activities listed for the day.³ Thus, the proportion values for each ranged from 0 to 1. On some days there were participants who did not have plans. In this case, the proportion was set to zero. Using the proportion variables is appropriate because they take into account the other types of anticipated activities and control for the total number of activities listed, thus capturing the overall, dominant character of the activities.

³ In an additional analysis, we analyzed the effects of each category of anticipated activities. Although single, childless employees reported both more personal development and community volunteering activities after work, neither of these explained the effect of family structure on absorption. In particular, neither had significant effects on absorption, and neither the indirect effects of anticipating personal development nor community activities were significant. This result suggests that the relevant distinction is between domestic and leisure activities.

Control variables. Importantly, although study 2 consisted primarily of daily surveys collecting within-person data (i.e. daily after-work activities and daily work absorption), our independent variable, family structure, is a between-person variable. Therefore, including both within and between-person control variables is appropriate for our full model. Similar to our job level control in study 1, we controlled for job differences specific to the sample, reflecting different levels of job complexity that would potentially affect absorption. An organization informant suggested that the least ambiguous indicator of job complexity and schedule variation was *monthly pay*, since non-exempt workers with fixed hours were paid bi-weekly (1) and exempt workers were paid monthly (2). As in study 1, we controlled for *age* and *sex*.

Additional controls were relevant to our daily diary design, although not relevant to the cross sectional design used in study 1. General trait-like absorption may affect employees' daily absorption, so following prior diary studies (e.g., Sonnentag, 2003), we controlled for respondents' overall absorption, collected on the general survey, as measured in study 1 ($\alpha = .72$). Last, we controlled for the start time of the earliest after-work activity, as this allowed us to control for variability in respondents' schedules and the possibility that time pressure might affect work absorption. *Earliest activity start time* was measured in elapsed minutes from midnight (e.g., 1AM equals 60 minutes).

Results: Study 2

Given our multi-level data, we account for between and within-person effects simultaneously in our primary mediation analysis using multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM). The intraclass correlation coefficient for absorption was .46, indicating that 46% of the variance was between person, which supports assessing both between and within-person effects. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables.

 Insert Table 2 about here

Given study 2's primary aim to test the effects of anticipated activities, we emphasize tests of Hypotheses 2 through 5.⁴ Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted within-person effects of daily anticipated after-work activities on daily work absorption. For this within-person analysis, there was no need to control for between-person variables (e.g. job type) since they do not affect the within-person variance. However, it was appropriate to control for day-level factors (e.g. earliest activity start time). Hypothesis 2 predicted that anticipating domestic activities would have a positive effect on work absorption. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was supported (estimate = .50, S.E. = .22, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 3 predicted that anticipating leisure activities would have a negative effect on work absorption. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was also supported (estimate = -.52, S.E. = .23, $p < .05$).

 Insert Table 3 about here

Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted indirect effects of family structure on daily work absorption via the proportion of anticipated domestic (Hypothesis 4) and leisure (Hypothesis 5) activities. To appropriately test for indirect effects using data at various levels of analysis (between-person: level 2 and within-person: level 1), we tested the hypotheses with MSEM using Mplus, following the procedure outlined by Preacher and colleagues for evaluating a 2-1-1

⁴A 2-1 multi-level analysis including between-person control variables showed that single, childless people reported lower absorption (estimate = -.41, S.E. = .22, $p < .05$, one tailed), consistent with Hypothesis 1. Although informative, this result should be interpreted with caution considering the person-level sample size based on listwise deletion ($N = 89 - \text{eight}$). Although our N size is consistent with other diary studies testing multi-level effects (e.g., Ilies, Keeney & Scott, 2011; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006), the person-level sample size is relatively small for testing between-person effects only.

mediation model (Preacher, 2011; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). This approach decomposes the variance into within and between-person components, rather than considering within and between person effects singularly (Preacher et al., 2010). In our case, the MSEM approach accounts for the effect of an individual's mean level of anticipated activities (between person) on daily absorption (within person). The between-level component reflects the relatively stable effect of anticipated activities on absorption, so that the analysis captures the effect of an individual's tendency to anticipate a particular category of activities. The within-level component accounts for daily variations in a person's mean level of anticipated activities on daily absorption. In this case we captured day-to-day changes in anticipated activities and the effects of variations from the mean. Given that family structure is a between-person variable, both the between and within components provide relevant information and are important in interpreting the MSEM results. Figure 1 displays the multilevel structural equation model for this 2-1-1 analysis.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Hypothesis 4 predicted that anticipating domestic activities after work would mediate the effect of family structure on work absorption. As shown in Table 4, family structure had a significant negative indirect effect on work absorption via anticipated domestic activities (coefficient = $-.17$, S.E. = $.09$, $p \leq .05$), thus supporting Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5 predicted that anticipating leisure activities would mediate the effect of family structure on work absorption. The indirect effect of family structure on absorption via anticipated leisure activities was not significant (coefficient = $-.17$, S.E. = $.17$, $p > .05$). Thus Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

 Insert Table 4 about here

Testing for Alternative Explanations

It is possible that the overall quantity of anticipated activities drives their indirect effect. In other words, our results could be interpreted to indicate that employees with families are simply busier after work and must use their work time more efficiently, thus rendering them more focused at work. Therefore, testing for the effects of the sheer number of activities anticipated after work is important, and allows us to determine whether our findings are driven simply by the quantity of anticipated activities, rather than by their nature. Accordingly, we counted the number of activities anticipated each day and entered this variable as a mediator in the same 2-1-1 mediation model used to test the effect of anticipating domestic/leisure activities. The correlation between the daily count of activities and daily absorption was not significant ($r = -.04, p > .05$). Similarly, the indirect effect of number of activities ($M = 2.16, S.D. = .84$) was not significant (coefficient $= -.00, S.E. = .03, p > .05$). This finding suggests that our effects are driven not by the number of anticipated after-work activities, but by their nature (domestic or leisure).

Given the prominent place of positive affect in theorizing about the effects of family on work (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001), we also examined whether the indirect effects remained significant over and above any impact of positive affect from home spilling over into work. Therefore, we ran our 2-1-1 models controlling for positive affect in the personal/family domain. We used the PANAS measure of positive affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), so that participants read, “Indicate the extent to which you have felt the following at home or in reference to your personal life in the past few weeks,” followed by a list of ten adjectives (e.g., excited, proud) (1 = very slightly or not at all, 5 = extremely), which were

averaged ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .63$, $\alpha = .86$). The correlation between positive affect and daily absorption was not significant ($r = .16$, $p > .05$). The indirect effect of family structure on absorption was significant over and above positive affect when proportion of domestic activities was the mediator (coefficient = $-.17$, $s.e. = .09$, $p \leq .05$), but not when proportion of leisure activities was the mediator (coefficient = $-.20$, $s.e. = .19$, $p > .05$)—similar to the results without the positive affect control. We also tested positive affect as a mediator of the effect of family structure on absorption using a 2-2-1 model in Mplus. The indirect effect was not significant (coefficient = $-.01$, $s.e. = .04$, $p > .05$), suggesting that our results are not explained by positive affect.

Another alternative explanation for our results is that employees may be more absorbed at work when family members rely on their incomes. To test this, we measured the extent to which respondents fulfilled a *breadwinner* role by averaging two items taken from Behson (2002): “I feel a great deal of responsibility to provide for my household,” and “If I didn’t have my job, there would still be plenty of money to support my household” (reverse coded) ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}$, $7 = \text{strongly agree}$; $r = .362$, $p < .001$). The correlation between breadwinner status and daily absorption was not significant ($r = -.004$, $p > .05$). Controlling for breadwinner status ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.30$), we found that the indirect effect of family structure on absorption was significant when the mediator was proportion of domestic activities (coefficient = $-.17$, $s.e. = .09$, $p \leq .05$), but not proportion of leisure activities (coefficient = $-.17$, $s.e. = .17$, $p > .05$). Consistent with our primary analysis, these results support our hypothesis that anticipated activities explain the effects of family structure on work absorption over and above breadwinner status. We also tested breadwinner status as a mediator of the relationship between family structure and absorption. The indirect effect was not significant (coefficient = $-.01$, $s.e. = .04$, $p > .05$), further discounting this alternative explanation of our results.

Discussion of Study 2

The study 2 data allowed us to test our prediction that anticipating after-work activities explains the effect of family structure on work absorption. As predicted, we found that anticipating more domestic activities led to increased work absorption, whereas anticipating more leisure activities led to lower work absorption. Also as predicted, we found a significant indirect effect of family structure on work absorption operating through the daily anticipation of domestic activities after work, but not through the anticipation of leisure activities.

Study 2 shed additional light on the relationship between family structure, non-work activities, and work absorption. Moreover, the daily diary survey design of study 2 strengthens the causal inference of our effects suggesting that, in fact, anticipating certain non-work activities does predict the individual's absorption at work. Additionally, our alternative analyses suggest that the nature of participants' after-work activities may affect work absorption over and above the sheer number of non-work activities planned, positive affect, or breadwinner status—all plausible alternative explanations for our effects. Also, contrary to expectations based on the ideal worker norm that those without families are “unencumbered,” there was no significant difference between single, childless employees and others in the overall number of anticipated after-work activities.

SUPPLEMENT TO STUDY 2

The primary aim of the supplement was to investigate whether respondents construed their after-work activities consistently with our theorizing. We also sought to provide supplemental evidence that their construal of after-work activities mediates the effect of anticipated activities on absorption. Therefore, we administered surveys to a sample of full-time

employees regarding their after-work activities, their construal of those activities, and their work absorption.

Sample and Procedures

Participants were Qualtrics™ panel members, working adults who agree to complete online surveys to earn points they can redeem for merchandise online. Only full-time employees who correctly responded to attention filter items (e.g., “leave this question blank”) were included in the sample. Similarly to study 2, on a morning survey, respondents reported their anticipated after-work activities. Respondents also reported their construal of each activity in the morning. Given our theorizing that anticipation of after-work activities impacts absorption because of the way people construe those activities, we thought it most appropriate to measure activity construal at the time of anticipation. On an afternoon survey, respondents reported their work absorption.⁵ Three hundred and eighty participants completed the morning survey, but 123 responded that they had no plans after work, so they were excluded, since the analysis focused on construal of anticipated activities. Our final sample included 196 participants with matched morning and afternoon surveys, reporting a total of 564 activities, of which 429 were categorized as domestic or leisure.

Measures

Our measure of absorption ($\alpha=.90$) and categories of activities were identical to those used in study 2. Participants also rated each activity on the extent to which it was *goal directed*, *obligatory*, or an *escape from the routine*. Goal direction was measured with four items ($\alpha = .92$), modified from Woolley’s (2009) measure of outcome focus. A sample item is, “When

⁵ We collected data a second day to compare the effects of recovery due to the prior day’s activities to the effects of same-day anticipated activities. This supplemental analysis is speculative given that we collected recovery measures and anticipated activities on the same survey, potentially shaping the results. However, we address these results in the general discussion section, and details of this analysis are available from the authors upon request.

participating in this activity, I think about what the final outcome of this activity will be” (1 *strongly disagree*, 7 *strongly agree*). To measure the extent to which activities were construed as obligatory, participants answered five questions ($\alpha = .81$), adapted from Weinstein and Ryan's (2010) controlled motivation scale. A sample item is, “I participate in this activity because I feel I have to” (1 *not at all true*, 7 *very true*). To measure escape from the routine, participants answered three questions ($\alpha = .93$), modified from the escaping pressures subscale of Schulz and Watkins' (2007) Leisure Meanings Inventory. A sample item is, “For me this activity is a break, a change from life's usual routine” (1 *strongly disagree*, 7 *strongly agree*).

Results: Supplement to Study 2

To assess differences in how respondents construed domestic and leisure activities at the activity level, we used the mixed model function in SPSS, as the after-work activities (level 1) are nested within people (level 2). To test for the effects of activity anticipation on absorption mediated by construal, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013).

Construal of Leisure and Domestic Activities. Our theorizing assumes that anticipated domestic activities are construed as more obligatory, more goal directed and less of an escape from the routine relative to leisure activities, which are voluntary (i.e., less obligatory), pursued for intrinsic reasons (i.e., less goal directed), and an escape from the daily routine. There was a significant effect of category type (domestic, leisure or other) on construal of the extent to which activities were goal directed ($F(2,537.60)=22.83, p<.001$), obligatory ($F(2,511.02)=48.56, p<.001$), and an escape from the routine ($F(2,562.04)=115.70, p<.001$). As expected, pairwise comparisons revealed that domestic activities were construed as more goal directed ($M=4.01$) than leisure activities ($M=3.42, p<.001$), and more obligatory ($M=3.80$) than leisure activities

($M=2.57$, $p<.001$). Also as expected, leisure activities were perceived as more of an escape from the routine ($M=5.75$) than were domestic activities ($M=3.27$, $p<.001$).

Construal as Mediator. Next, we explored the extent to which activity construal mediated the effects of anticipating activities on afternoon absorption. Respondents indicated how long they expected to participate in each after-work activity, and we calculated the proportion of anticipated domestic and leisure *time* planned for after work, an improvement over the count-based proportions used in study 2. We aggregated each construal to the person level by averaging them for all activities anticipated that day. For example, if a respondent anticipated three activities, we averaged their ratings of goal direction across activities to reflect their overall construal of goal direction for the day. As with study 2, we controlled for earliest activity start time, job level, age, and gender (collected one day before the surveys about activities).

Our theorizing suggests that because domestic activities are construed as obligatory, goal directed and routine, anticipating them reinforces work absorption. Indeed, the indirect effect of anticipating domestic activities on absorption through the measure of obligatory construal is positive and significant (estimate=.18; 95% CI = [.02, .42]; see Table 6). With goal direction as the mediator, the indirect effect was not significant (estimate=.08; 95% CI = [-.02, .24]; see Table 6). With escape from the routine as the mediator, the indirect effect was significant but negative (estimate=-.32; 95% CI = [-.67, -.07]; see Table 6), contrary to our expectations.

 Insert Tables 5 & 6 about here

Because leisure activities are construed as voluntary (rather than obligatory), intrinsically motivated (rather than goal-directed), and an escape from the routine, we expected that anticipating leisure activities would reduce work absorption. As expected, with obligatory

construal as the mediator, the indirect effect of anticipating leisure activities on absorption was negative and significant (estimate=-.14; 95% CI =[-.37, -.01]; see Table 6), as was the indirect effect with goal direction as the mediator (estimate=-.24; 95% CI =[-.52, -.08]; see Table 6).

Contrary to our expectations, however, with escape from the routine as the mediator, the indirect effect was positive and significant (estimate=.40; 95% CI = [.14, .75]).

Testing for Alternative Explanations

As with study 2, we sought to understand the role of positive affect in our findings, given the importance of affect to research on work engagement and the work/non-work interface (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). Therefore, we collected respondents' positive affect on the same survey with which we collected data on anticipated activities, using the same items from study 2, modified to address affect on the day of interest. Specifically, the item stem stated, "Indicate the extent to which you feel the following today", followed by affect descriptors (e.g., excited, distressed) ($\alpha = .92$). Our analyses of the supplemental data show that neither anticipating domestic nor leisure activities was significantly related to positive affect (domestic: $r = -.12$, $p > .05$, leisure: $r = .02$, $p > .05$). Further, there was no significant indirect effect of domestic activities on absorption through positive affect (estimate=-.198; 95% CI = [-.449, .008]), nor was there a significant indirect effect of leisure activities on absorption through positive affect (estimate=.048; 95% CI = [-.160, .267]). These analyses suggest that positive affect does not drive our results. Further, these findings reinforce the perspective that non-work experiences can help increase work absorption regardless of whether the experiences are explicitly positive.

Discussion of Supplement to Study 2

The analysis of activity construal provides support for key assumptions in our theorizing. That is, domestic activities are seen as more obligatory, more goal directed, and less of an escape

from the routine than leisure activities. Further, as we expected, construing activities as more goal-directed and obligatory was positively related to work absorption. The analyses of indirect effects suggest that construing activities as obligatory drives the effects on absorption for both domestic and leisure activities. Goal direction, however, appears to be relevant only for explaining why leisure activities (which are low in goal direction) have the predicted negative effect on absorption.

Although the logic of anticipatory transitions (Richter, 1990) and current concerns theory (Klinger et al., 1980) suggest that anticipating an escape from the daily work routine should detract from work absorption, the positive effect of construing an activity as an escape from the routine suggests some additional complexities that may not be captured here. We offer several possibilities for future research to explore. In particular, characterizing an activity as “an escape from the daily routine” does not account for the fact that anticipating some non-routine activities (e.g., watching a television special) may not be sufficiently compelling to distract from the current task and reduce absorption—particularly for someone performing complex, engaging work. This idea is consistent with recovery research showing that features such as how active, passive, or challenging an activity is (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Rook & Zijlstra, 2006) may shape the extent to which employees detach and recover from work. Moreover, there may be an interplay between an activity’s non-routine nature and other characteristics, such as goal direction. For instance, playing in a competitive soccer game after work may be a break from the daily routine, but it may also be construed as a goal-directed activity—particularly for someone motivated to win or reach a certain performance level in the game, thus potentially reinforcing a work mindset.

In sum, although our unexpected finding suggests that anticipating an escape from the routine may provide a boost in resources available for work absorption in the same way that taking a break after work provides recovery, perhaps only certain non-routine activities—e.g. those that are highly active and low in goal direction—cause the type of distraction we predicted. Importantly, our results were as predicted: anticipating leisure activities had a negative effect on work absorption through their negative relationship with goal direction and sense of obligation. In total, those effects may supersede the positive effects of viewing leisure activities as an escape from the daily routine. Moreover, our overall findings—that anticipating after-work domestic activities explains the effect of family structure on absorption—support our argument that family responsibilities can lead to increased absorption at work.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We examined the relationship between employees' family structure and work absorption, and how anticipated after-work activities mediate this relationship. Supporting our hypothesis, we found in our first study that single, childless employees reported lower work absorption than employees with other family structures combined. Our second study revealed a negative indirect effect of being single and childless on work absorption via employees' anticipated after-work activities. As we predicted, anticipating domestic activities after work increased work absorption, whereas anticipating leisure activities decreased work absorption. Further, we found that anticipating *domestic* activities after work mediated the effect of family structure on absorption, whereas anticipating *leisure* activities did not. Finally, our findings suggest that the differential construal of domestic and leisure activities as goal-directed and obligatory helps to explain the effects of anticipated activities on absorption. In sum, our findings suggest that the

daily tasks associated with having a spouse and/or children induce greater psychological immersion into the work role.

Expanding Theories for How the Non-work Domain Affects Work

Our findings contribute to existing theoretical explanations by showing that the presence of a nuclear family can induce greater focus at work. Historical assumptions that family responsibilities detract from work remain prevalent (Kelly et al., 2010; Reid, 2015; Williams, 2001). For example, in a recent survey of over 2000 employees, 40% agreed that workers without personal commitments are most productive, and the majority believed that ideal workers would make themselves available for business needs regardless of the time of day (SHRM Online Staff, 2011). Some research does show that having a family can result in increased demands at home, and that for some employees family responsibilities can negatively impact work (e.g., Frone et al., 1992; Rothbard, 2001) — findings that may help to fuel negative work-family assumptions. In contrast, and consistent with the enrichment perspective, we consider how family may affect work positively. Unlike those of prior enrichment studies, our findings suggest that participation in the family role can yield positive effects on work whether or not the connection between work and family is characterized by positive affect or skill transfer between the two roles—fundamental tenets of enrichment theorizing (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001).

Our work also provides a different perspective on research showing that participation in leisure activities after work enhances recovery from work, thus enabling heightened work engagement the following day (e.g., Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006). Ironically, we found that anticipating the activities less likely to facilitate recovery after work (domestic) keeps employees more psychologically immersed in their work during the day. Conversely, anticipating activities

more likely to provide recovery after work (leisure), induces psychological detachment from work before the work day is done, resulting in lower work absorption. Importantly, in an alternative analysis of the study 2 supplement data, we found that anticipating leisure activities significantly reduced afternoon absorption even when taking into account the prior day's activities and morning recovery. This finding raises interesting questions about the net effects of after-work leisure activities on employees, and it suggests that the period of time before a leisure activity may be just as important to consider in recovery research as the period of time after the activity. Our work also illuminates a relationship between family structure and after-work activities that may help scholars understand how an employee's family structure may constrain or enhance their ability to recover from work at the end of the day. By connecting absorption, anticipation of after-work activities, and family structure, we introduce factors that can potentially expand the logic of recovery research.

Finally, our studies contribute to both theory and practice by focusing on single, childless workers, a growing portion of the population largely unaddressed in work/non-work theorizing (Eby et al., 2005). In our data, the lower reported work absorption of single, childless employees was explained by fewer domestic activities scheduled after work, a finding consistent with expectations that their lives may be less encumbered than those of other employees. However, although they anticipated a greater proportion of leisure activities than workers with other family structures, this did not mediate the effect of family structure on absorption. Further, single, childless workers reported no fewer activities overall than those with families, and the total number of activities planned for after work did not mediate the relationship between family structure and work absorption. These findings highlight the need to consider more closely the

effects of non-family, non-work activities on employees' work experiences. They also illuminate our understanding of the non-work activities of single, childless workers.

Single childless workers exist at the intersection of ideal worker expectations that potentially render their family structure a positive signal to organizations, and pressure to live up to the "ideal worker" norm, as our opening quote illustrates. Hamilton and colleagues (2006) found that single, childless women experienced work-life conflict due to these pressures and expectations that they would be continuously available for work. Additionally, many single workers often feel that they do not have organizational support in pursuing fulfilling non-work lives (Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007) and feel overlooked when companies only offer family-specific policies (Grover, 1991; Kossek & Nichol, 1992). Thus, although single, childless workers may benefit from assumptions of being unencumbered and constantly accessible, many experience these expectations as unwanted pressure or an undue burden (Casper et al., 2007; Rothausen, Gonzalez, Clarke, & O'Dell, 1998). Single, childless workers in our sample reported more developmental and community volunteering activities than did workers with other family structures—further reinforcing the idea that they seek full and active lives outside of work rather than singular devotion and constant accessibility to the work organization. Moreover, their work-life interface, needs and concerns are likely more complex than is commonly acknowledged, thus warranting further study.

Practical Implications for Managers and Employees

Our focus on the psychological effects of anticipating future activities presents both a new way of thinking about the connection between work and non-work and also suggests action steps that both individuals and organizations can take to leverage employees' non-work responsibilities. In our data, few respondents anticipated *only* leisure activities and few

anticipated *only* domestic activities, so we suggest that selectively invoking specific after-work activities may be a way to enhance absorption. Boundary theorists document instances in which thoughts of non-work roles during the work day can distract workers and disrupt their work mindset (e.g., Glavin et al., 2011; Smit et al., 2016). However, depending on how employees manage the work/non-work boundary, these cognitive transitions to non-work roles can also induce a greater focus on work (Richter, 1990). Nippert-Eng (1996), in her seminal work on work/non-work boundary management, described the ways employees could use the placement of calendars, to-do lists, or visual reminders of upcoming tasks to redirect their focus:

This calendar lists three types of events, her vacation days, her departmental softball games, and weekend visits from her family.... Joan simply has to look up to be reminded that at a certain time, she'll be doing something she really enjoys, something more personally exciting, perhaps, than the task at hand. (p. 572)

According to our findings, this display of leisure activities likely reduces the employee's work absorption, but a display of future domestic tasks might reinforce a work focus. Overall, Nippert-Eng's work suggests that the choice to display reminders of future events selectively and strategically may help employees with both planning and refocusing on work. This is consistent with Richter's (1990) concept of anticipatory boundary transitions, and her theorizing that anticipating domestic activities after work reinforces a work mindset. Additionally, Mainemelis (2001) suggested that organizational rituals (e.g., morning coffee in the break room) can help employees transition to and from work in ways that contribute to work absorption. Moreover, mindfulness training can help employees minimize unplanned mental transitions to non-work roles and focus more at work (Michel, Bosch, & Rexroth, 2014).

Our results also suggest that managers may need to attend more closely to the work-life needs of single, childless employees. Casper et al. (2007) found that single, childless workers felt more supported in organizations that provided them equal benefits and showed equal respect

for diverse aspects of employees' non-work lives. Organizations should acknowledge the complexity of the work lives of single, childless workers—perhaps adopting policies that help them pursue goal-directed activities outside of work. Such organizational support could help make work more compelling for single, childless employees. Importantly, our results do not suggest that organizations benefit from having employees who are unsatisfied or unstimulated in their lives outside of work. Rather, we suggest that organizations work to understand the diversity of employees' non-work lives and create environments that value those differences.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our research contributes to the literature in important ways, we must acknowledge its limitations. One limitation is that the survey data consisted of self-reported behaviors, potentially yielding common-method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Importantly, however, the respondents themselves are the best source of information for our key constructs. Moreover, given that our independent variable, family structure, is composed of respondents' marital and parental status rather than attitudes or perceptions, collecting it on the survey with work absorption is not likely to inflate statistical effects between the two variables. Finally, we collected the study 2 data at multiple points in time, and the results were consistent with the study 1 results, further reducing concerns over common-method bias.

Important questions unanswered by our analyses concern the effects of spousal employment status and the employee's gender, two critical factors in the traditional ideal worker ideology, which rests on the model of a male employee with a stay-at-home wife (Williams, 2001). Moreover, our study 2 and supplement samples are majority female, potentially shaping our results, although study 1 was more gender balanced. To address these issues, we conducted additional analyses decomposing family structure into six mutually exclusive categories,

crossing marital status, employment status of the spouse, and parental status. These analyses allowed us to compare the single, childless category to each of the other family categories (e.g., married/unemployed spouse/no child, married/employed spouse/child, etc.). The results of this post-hoc analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), although only suggestive due to inconsistent cell sizes across categories, provide preliminary evidence that spousal employment status is not a systematic driver of our results. Importantly, this analysis also indicates that our effects are not driven simply by parental or marital status alone. In addition, our study 2 findings suggest that domestic tasks affect work absorption over and above gender.⁶ Future work should continue to explore the effects of different family structures, including cohabitating heterosexual couples (not studied here), as well as gender differences.

Another important issue to explore in future research is the overall impact of after-work activities on work. Whereas our findings present an interesting contrast to research on after-work recovery (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006), they also raise the question of how the effects of anticipating after-work activities relate to the after-effects of those activities on the following day. Yet they also show that leisure activities are construed as an escape from the daily routine, and anticipating this escape positively affects absorption, a finding consistent with a fundamental tenet of recovery research — that detaching from work is beneficial. These findings, considered along with our overall negative effects of anticipating leisure activities on work absorption, suggest that there are remaining complexities to explore, and that moderators—such as how active (Rook & Zijlstra, 2006) or challenging (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006) the leisure activity is—should be examined. A review of the activities anticipated by our respondents (see appendix)

⁶ In an alternative analysis not shown, we found that the interaction between family structure and sex (which served as a proxy for gender) did not have a significant effect on absorption ($p > .05$), suggesting that the main effect for family structure did not depend on gender (sex).

suggests that many of them were not highly challenging or active, but we do not have data on respondents' perceptions of their activities on these particular dimensions. However, those particular aspects of after-work activities could be an important issue for scholars to explore. Overall, future research should continue to consider the effects of after-work activities comprehensively—how they affect the work experience both before and after work, which effect is strongest, and how different features of after-work activities shape these effects.

Finally, we examined respondents' work absorption rather than time spent at work or productivity. Our examination of absorption in the context of the ideal worker ideology emphasizes the view that an employee's value in the organization may not be primarily dependent upon constant accessibility and face-time spent at work, but rather on an individual's ability to give his or her maximum mental energy while there. This is particularly the case for professional knowledge workers. Many organizations buy into the "ideal worker" ideology when they reward "face time" either implicitly or explicitly, and they send the message to employees that they are more valuable to the extent that they can make themselves available to work on an unlimited basis (Reid, 2015). This benefits employees with an "ideal worker" family structure, but there is little evidence that those who spend more time at work are more valuable. Future research considering how family structure affects a variety of other work outcomes would help expand theory regarding the effect of non-work on work.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of family structure has caused a shift in organizational demographics, prompting a reexamination of our expectations about the work-family relationship. A critical part of revising current theory about the effect of family on work is to consider family structure more comprehensively, and also to examine directly the

way family structure shapes people's non-work lives. Overall with this work, we seek to enrich our collective knowledge of the effects of family responsibilities on employees' work experiences.

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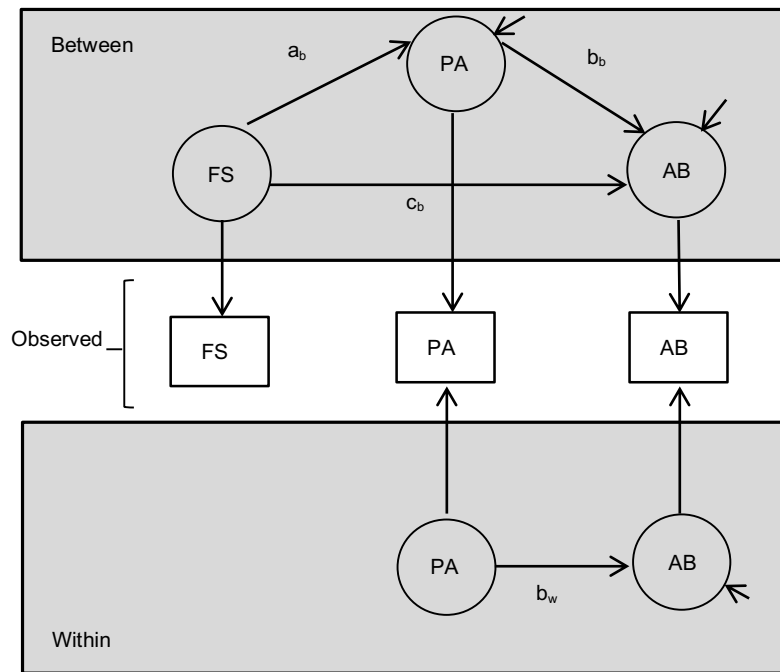
Figure 1

Figure 1. Multilevel structural equation model showing a 2-1-1 multi-level mediation model between family structure (FS), planned after work activities (PA)—domestic or leisure, and work absorption (AB). Figure is based on Preacher et al. (2011).

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations in Study 1

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
Work absorption	4.31	1.00				
Gender	0.39	0.49	-0.07			
Age	38.52	10.30	0.07	-0.23 **		
Job level	3.29	0.77	0.13 **	-0.20 **	0.48 **	
Single childless	0.24	0.43	-0.16 **	0.16 **	-0.28 **	-0.29 **

N=353

† p<.10

* p<.05

** p<.01

TABLE 2
Intercorrelations Between Variables in Study 2

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Person level</i>										
1 Single childless	0.26	0.44	-0.03	-0.19 †	-0.22 *	-0.02	-0.28 **	0.31 **	-0.19 †	-0.10
2 Gender	0.82	0.39		0.10	-0.09	-0.01	0.00	-0.09	-0.01	-0.15
3 Age	43.30	10.98			-0.28 **	0.18 †	0.17 †	-0.38 **	0.20 *	-0.01
4 Monthly pay	1.88	0.32				0.00	-0.10	0.13	-0.17 †	-0.11
5 General absorption	4.42	1.04					0.04	-0.06	0.53 **	-0.02
<i>Day level</i>										
6 Proportion domestic	0.31	0.27						-0.34 **	0.35 **	-0.05
7 Proportion leisure	0.14	0.11					-0.23 **		-0.31 **	0.39 **
8 Daily absorption	4.47	0.95					0.01	-0.05		0.11
9 Earliest activity start time	1002.24	132.11					0.02	0.05	0.18 **	

Note. Correlations at the day level are displayed below the diagonal (N=439); correlations at the person level, averaged across the 5 days, are displayed above the diagonal (N= 97). N sizes are based on maximum likelihood estimation models using all available data.

† p<.10

* p<.05

** p<.01

TABLE 3

Effects of Proportion Domestic/Leisure Activities on Daily Work Absorption

	Estimate		SE		Estimate		SE
Intercept	4.72	**	0.38	Intercept	5.04	**	0.36
Earliest activity	0.00		0.00	Earliest activity	0.00		0.00
Proportion domestic	0.50	*	0.22	Proportion leisure	-0.52	*	0.23

† p<.10

* p<.05

** p<.01

TABLE 4
Multi-level Mediation Model (2-1-1) Predicting Daily Work Absorption
from Family Structure and Proportion Domestic/Leisure Activities

Parameter	Mediator: Proportion Domestic			Mediator: Proportion Leisure	
	Estimate	SE		Estimate	SE
Between level					
Intercept	2.13	1.58		2.51	1.71
Path a _b	-0.16 **	0.06		0.08 *	0.04
Path b _b	1.02 **	0.39		-2.04	1.46
path c _b	-0.22	0.22		-0.22	0.29
Indirect effect ¹	-0.17 *	0.09		-0.17	0.17
Residual variance absorption	0.51 **	0.11		0.52 **	0.11
Residual variance mediator	0.07 **	0.01		0.01 **	0.00
Within level					
Path b _w	0.01	0.19		-0.22	0.19
Residual variance absorption	1.00 **	0.10		0.99 **	0.10

Note: Models are fixed slope models; N=97 at the person level & N=439 at the day level based on maximum likelihood estimation models using all available data.

Average number of observations per person = 4.56. The paths refer to Figure 1.

Path a_b family structure->prop. domestic; path b_b prop. domestic-> absorption;

path c_b family structure -> absorption; path b_w prop. domestic/leisure -> absorption.

The model includes the following control variables: sex, age, monthly pay, general absorption and earliest activity start time.

¹ The indirect effect is represented in Figure 1 as the path a_b and b_b.

† p<.10

* p<.05

** p<.01

TABLE 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 2 Supplement

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Absorption	4.08	1.48									
2 Proportion leisure	0.31	0.40	-0.05								
3 Proportion domestic	0.38	0.40	0.00	-0.51 **							
4 Obligatory	3.22	1.33	0.13 †	-0.27 **	0.29 **						
5 Escape from routine	4.41	1.67	0.19 **	0.43 **	-0.41 **	-0.10					
6 Goal directed	3.90	1.42	0.23 **	-0.27 **	0.08	0.41 **	0.11				
7 Age	45.44	12.25	0.07	-0.03	0.06	-0.13 †	-0.01	-0.05			
8 Gender	0.72	0.45	-0.11	-0.04	0.07	0.02	-0.09	0.03	-0.11		
9 Job level	2.94	0.76	0.11	-0.11	0.09	0.01	0.06	-0.01	0.29 **	-0.20 **	
10 Earliest activity start time	1667.96	270.37	0.03	-0.01	-0.13 †	0.01	0.09	0.00	-0.05	0.00	0.06

N=196

† p<.10

* p<.05

** p<.01

TABLE 6
Indirect Effects of Anticipated Activities on Absorption^a: Study 2 Supplement

Independent Variable: Proportion Domestic				Independent Variable: Proportion Leisure			
<i>Mediator</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>Mediator</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Obligatory	18(.09)	0.02	0.42	Obligatory	-.14(.09)	-0.37	-0.01
Goal Direction	.08(.08)	-0.02	0.24	Goal Direction	-.24(.11)	-0.52	-0.08
Escape	-.32(.15)	-0.67	-0.07	Escape	.40(.15)	0.14	0.75

^a All models include the following control variables: age, gender, job level, and earliest activity start time. Each indirect effect was run as a separate model. Estimates reflect activity -> mediator -> absorption effects. Values in bold type show significant indirect effects (CI excludes zero).

LLCI = lower level of 95% bootstrapped confidence interval; ULCI=upper level of 95% bootstrapped confidence interval

APPENDIX

After-Work Domestic and Leisure Activities Anticipated by Respondents

Study 2

Domestic Activity	Count	%
Child care	52	17.99%
Misc.	47	16.26%
Shopping/errands	36	12.46%
Cooking	35	12.11%
Pet care	28	9.69%
Laundry	20	6.92%
Paperwork/taxes/bills	17	5.88%
Dinner	14	4.84%
Cleaning	12	4.15%
Auto or home maintenance	11	3.81%
Non-child caregiving	8	2.77%
Family time	6	2.08%
Medical appointments	3	1.04%
Total Domestic	289	

Leisure Activity	Count	%
Dinner with friends	30	34.09%
Misc.	18	20.45%
Family/child outing	10	11.36%
Cultural event	5	5.68%
Sports/games	5	5.68%
Drinks with friends	4	4.55%
Shopping	4	4.55%
TV	4	4.55%
Outing with friends	3	3.41%
Date	3	3.41%
Movie	2	2.27%
Total Leisure	88	

Supplement to Study 2

Domestic Activity	Count	%
Shopping/errands	58	20.49%
Cooking	51	18.02%
Child care	40	14.13%
Misc.	28	9.89%
Family time	27	9.54%
Laundry	20	7.07%
Cleaning	17	6.01%
Pet care	15	5.30%
Auto or home maintenance	14	4.95%
Medical appointments	5	1.77%
Non-child caregiving	4	1.41%
Paperwork/taxes/bills	3	1.06%
Dinner	1	.35%
Total Domestic	283	

Leisure Activity	Count	%
Dinner with friends/dinner out	30	20.55%
Sports/games	25	17.12%
Family outing	23	15.75%
Misc.	22	15.07%
Outing with friends	13	8.90%
Drinks with friends/drinks out	9	6.16%
Shopping	6	4.11%
TV	6	4.11%
Cultural event	4	2.74%
Date	3	2.05%
Movie	3	2.05%
Child outing	2	1.37%
Total Leisure	146	

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